What Happens When Two AutoCAD Experts Compare DraftSight to AutoCAD?

Lynn Allen

Brandon Loehr

Lynn Allen spent over 20 years with Autodesk promoting its annual releases, producing hundreds of video tips, writing countless articles for Cadalyst Magazine, and writing three AutoCAD books. There are not many people out there who know more about AutoCAD than her. As a Technology Evangelist, she is always staying on top of CAD trends and working to help people embrace change. She virtually met up with Brandon Loehr, founder of the blog and YouTube Channel CAD Intentions, a civil designer and fellow AutoCAD evangelist, to take a look at DraftSight from the perspective of an AutoCAD User. The two had plenty to talk about, including noting that the transition and differences just aren't that big. If you are considering making the transition from AutoCAD to DraftSight, it's an affordable, easy switch. As Lynn says, "Give it a whirl, right?"

Lynn Allen: *What is one of the first things that you noticed when you looked at the DraftSight range of products?*

Brandon: *I think the first thing is just how much is included for the price in each tier of DraftSight. The fact that you basically get a full version of AutoCAD for about the price of a month or two of AutoCAD is a big selling feature, especially for hobbyists. It's a super affordable option for them that makes a lot of sense given how similar DraftSight is to AutoCAD and all the features.*

Lynn: *DraftSight makes sense for the budget conscious for sure. Did you also notice there happen to be options for perpetual and network licenses? Because you know AutoCAD moved over to named users (no more network licenses); and also, no more perpetual. Big Ixnay on the perpetual!*

Brandon: *Perpetual is a big selling feature and a question that comes up a lot. It is a great feature to have and the ability to pay one price and keep your software is huge.*

Lynn: *With big companies that have casual users, it's really nice to have the network licenses. They might have 20 users and network licenses for five or ten. When you switch to named users like that, it's a big problem for them. So, tell me about the download and the install?*

Brandon: *Yeah, that was one thing I noticed, just how compact the file is. It's much smaller than AutoCAD and installed quite a bit quicker. It also seems to start up faster. It's a newer software that doesn't have as much bloat from decades of versions. It's nice to see. It's definitely better for older laptops. It runs really well on my laptop as well as my desktop.*

Lynn: Yeah, well that's nice. AutoCAD is almost 40 so it's got a lot of code in there. There's a lot going on and they don't like to get rid of anything. They don't like to get rid of any of the commands if they don't have to. Did you have any concerns about using new software with your existing files and templates?

Brandon: That was one of the first things I checked. I was curious and hesitant to see how files would react. If you would get error messages or if anything didn't work but with everything, I have used it for and tried it with including DWT template files and title blocks everything has come across cleanly and worked really well in DraftSight. I haven't run into any errors or crashes or version incompatibility. It's been really nice.

Lynn: That is good to hear. What about saving or exporting drawings in a variety of formats?

Brandon: It is nice to be able to export as or save as DXF which is standard with a lot of other software, especially when going back and forth to things like 3D printers or surveying equipment. And that all worked really well. As well as the ability to save back to older versions of DWGs which can be an issue when working with clients and they need an older version of AutoCAD because they haven't upgraded. DraftSight provides that ability which is nice.

Lynn: In some cases, DraftSight actually does a better job of saving backwards than AutoCAD does. You can save a DWG all the way back to Release 12! It does a great job with that. How does DraftSight handle Dynamic Blocks? A lot of the other CAD programs don't know how to handle dynamic blocks, and that is one of the things about DraftSight that I'm sure you noticed.

Brandon: I worked with an AutoCAD dynamic block, and everything worked seamlessly. There were no issues bringing in dynamic blocks I had made. Everything seemed to work.

Lynn: Walk us through opening DraftSight for the first time. The first thing, you worry about is the user interface. How did you feel when you opened it for the first time?

Brandon: Yeah. It is always interesting to open a new software, starting from scratch. Luckily, with DraftSight, everything felt really familiar right off the bat in a good way. Everything transitioned, at least with my workflow. I use the command line a lot rather than buttons. I like that my commands still work in DraftSight whether they were the same or not, it automatically transitions the command to the DraftSight equivalent. The biggest thing was the familiarity, just how comfortable everything felt and the ability to use the classic workspace. I know a lot of part time users, especially ones that haven't used drafting software in a while, prefer the classic version over the ribbon layout. I also liked the quick commands, to bring up windows. All those work seamlessly. It's nice to be able to make a transition and not have to spend a bunch of time learning how things work or where things are laid out. It's straight forward and easy to pick up.

Lynn: Autodesk actually hid the classic workspace from the AutoCAD users. So many people were very upset about that. And were you able to use your AutoCAD commands?

Brandon: Yeah. I haven't found any that completely didn't work. Sometimes they are slightly different, but DraftSight will recognize all the ones that I have tested so far. There are very few differences.

Lynn: Which is great because you can take your AutoCAD knowledge and just import it right into DraftSight which is important. So, how about some of the differences? Because of course it's not exactly the same. Then it would be … AutoCAD! So, tell us about some of the differences that you've found.

Brandon: Yeah, for sure. I think a couple of the main differences would be, one, the TB layers toggle on the status bar at the bottom and the ability to set different entities to default to specific layers and set their default properties as you create them. That's a cool feature that I didn't even know was in there. That saves a lot of time and helps with standards and keeping things similar throughout your drawings if you can set that up. I really like that. Another one that people will really like is Power Trim. It speeds things up. Trim was always too many clicks. So being able to just drag the mouse around and trim things automatically speed things up and is a really nice feature.

Lynn: AutoCAD did update their Trim, but I couldn't find actual Power Trim like the one that exists in DraftSight. That's a very cool feature.

Lynn: To me, one of the things is it is very mechanically focused.

Brandon: Yea, I guess off the top of my head, I'm a civil designer and there isn't a lot of survey or civil features or support in it right now. I found an add-in that syncs and brings in imagery for DraftSight, which is a cool feature that I was able to add to it. It would be a great addition for anyone in Mechanical because you get a lot of those added features that aren't in LT or plain AutoCAD.

Lynn: For AEC, they are going to be adding more and more features. They are working on that. And customization, we didn't really get to talk about that. Are you into LISP or any customizations?

Brandon: I did use some LISP. For the most part, basic LISP, .lsp files all worked. When it got to visual or .vlx, or apps, I ran into a few issues there or just the inability to load a .vlx which a lot of newer LISP stuff created in AutoCAD goes towards that.

Lynn: So, it works with AutoLISP, and they are adding Visual Lisp in DraftSight21 (February 2021 release).

Brandon: That will be cool. There isn't a lot of difference between the two. The .vlx's are for the most part just encrypted, compressed, LISP files, and you can run multiple ones in one. You can create workarounds.

Lynn: Have you done customized work, customized menus, and things like that?

Brandon: I did customize a bit of it. It was straight-forward. A lot of the same features. I like the alias editor in the options. It is something that I change a lot in my AutoCAD, the old PGP files, or alias editor now, but it is nice to be able to change that. There were a lot of customization options.

Lynn: What would you suggest for someone looking to try it out?

Brandon: I'd suggest just doing it. Grabbing the trial. It's free for 30 days. You can learn quickly that the transition and the difference isn't that big, so it's an affordable, easy switch, that I think a lot of people can benefit from. Especially if you are using AutoCAD LT right now, DraftSight is a perfect option. I've enjoyed my time working with it and will continue to.

Lynn: Give it a whirl, right? Give it a try. Why not try it? You can see for yourself. And if it doesn't fit, then you will know.

Brandon: Exactly.

Lynn: You can save a lot of money.

Learn more about [Switching to DraftSight with CATI](#) or [get a free trial](#) today.

This article reproduction provided by Computer Aided Technology, a leading authorized reseller and educator for SOLIDWORKS, DraftSight, and other popular Dassault Systèmes products.

COMPUTER AIDED **TECHNOLOGY** **||** WE EMPOWER THE INNOVATORS

cati.com **||** 888.308.2284